



## The ascent of Kanchenjunga

Visiting the UK earlier this year, **Linda Phillips** made her second assault on the mountain.



Linda at the summit, sheltering from the cold wind and rain behind the new cairn, happy to have reached the summit. The SD cairn in the distance.

For any TARS member doing a pilgrimage to Ransome country, there are a number of must-see locations to visit. Wild Cat Island, being Peel Island, is top of the list, of course, but we can add Holly Howe (Bank Ground Farm), Rio (Bowness), the Dogs' Home, the North Pole (or at least the general location), plus the locations in the Broads and Secret Water.

Kanchenjunga, or, as natives know it, Coniston Old Man, will be seen, but rarely climbed. You can't miss it. If you stay at Holly Howe, it looms over the lake, opposite you, and does so in fact on any visit to Coniston and the lakeside. But it's a serious climb, calling for fitness and preparation. I visited the UK in May 2019, and,

with my brother, attempted the climb. I got half-way, resting at Low Water (which is actually the highest water in the UK), with my aching feet dipped in the refreshingly cold water.

I tried again in May 2022, but this time came prepared. I spent a year exercising, walking, and losing weight on a low carb diet (shedding 12 kg), and this time successfully reached the peak. At age 69, I felt fitter than I had felt in 30 years, but even so, I barely made it.

How to plan the ascent, which is the best way to go: these are common topics. Is there an easy way up? The answer to that one is simple... no! The Swallows and Amazons climbed Kanchenjunga in *Swallowdale*. It would be fun to follow the route they took, but AR is vague about it. Plus, I note they took two days to do it, camping overnight, something I wish I had done!

What can we learn of the route from *Swallowdale*? It starts off in Chapter XXV, 'Up River', with the Great Aunt temporarily disposed of.

"The G.A.'ll be driving round to the head of the lake and crossing the river at Udal Bridge, and we'd better

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get above it and out of sight”. Udal Bridge doesn’t exist, neither does the Amazon River. They are crossing a fictional road which follows the western shore of The Lake. Their aim is to get half-way up the mountain before dark, to camp.

“Where did you say we were going to sleep?” said Susan at last. “Half-way up the mountain,” said Nancy... “It’s a fine place for a camp, just above the tree level.”

They are climbing near what the natives call Coniston village. The treeline is indeed about half-way up. Driving up Station Road, you take a left and a right turn past The Sun hotel, then the steep road terminates in a car park. Reversing from here, another local road skirts the treeline via YHA Coniston Holly How (not to be confused with our Holly Howe) and Low Yewdale. That car park formed the ‘base camp’ for my brother and me, but if you think starting off a climb half-way up makes it sound easy, think again. (Parking was free in 2019, £8 in 2022.)

In Chapter XXVI, they reach the Half-Way Camp.

They begin to climb, following ‘[t]his stream hurrying down from Kanchenjunga’. There is in real life a stream from Low Water: Low Water Beck, flowing past the Copper Mines. Ascending the path from the carpark to Low Water, you look down, well below, and can see the beck. ‘To the left the peak of Kanchenjunga rose above the lesser crags that curved about the head of the ravine. Far up among those crags they could see thin white lines where the becks were still carrying off the water collected on the tops. To right and left of them were rough fells through which it seemed that the little stream at their feet had carved a channel fit for a river a thousand times bigger than itself.’ From here, the peak of Kanchenjunga is very obviously ‘to the left’, while the ‘lesser crags’ would probably be Swirl How and Wetherlam. AR is right: the channel cuts deep and wide as though a bigger river once flowed there.

Susan says, “I suppose this is the place for the camp?” They were high enough to see Swallowdale through the telescope, or at least, the Watchtower, but “you can’t see Rio,” says Titty. So where was the camp? The picture in *SD* shows the four of them sleeping on a patch of flat ground, right next to a steep mountain slope, with a hint of a beck tumbling down it, and perhaps The Lake

in the distance. In the morning they wash in a stream, in a pool, while John ‘put his head under a tiny waterfall’.

The Amazons arrive and join the Swallows. My choice for a campsite would have been right by Low Water, but evidently they haven’t yet climbed that far. Another choice, lower down, is by some old stone huts, next to cables running down from slate works, but AR makes no mention of either. So I assume they were close to Low Water Beck. There is no obvious path by the beck, but on another visit, I’d like to track the beck and see if there is an obvious location.



Looking down on Goats Water. The picture really doesn’t give the feel of how steep that climb has already been.

In Chapter XXVII, ‘The Summit of Kanchenjunga,’ the ascent from the campsite continues.

Nancy has brought a rope, for use in climbing steep sections. “We shan’t go by the path,” said Nancy. “When we come to a rock, we’ll go over it.” So we deduce they are near a path. With the six of them tied together by the rope, the procession climbs ‘slopes so steep that nobody wanted to talk at all. There were things to shout, such as “Don’t touch this rock. It’s a loose one,” but mostly it was

grim, straight-ahead, silent climbing.’

Grim, straight-ahead, silent climbing. Oh yes, I know all about that!

Then they came to the ‘tough bit’. ‘They had come to a steep face of rock, not really very difficult, because there were cracks running across it which made good footholds and handholds, but not a good place to tumble down, because there was nothing to stop you and there were a lot of loose stones at the bottom of it.’

Where are they at this stage? The obvious location is by Low Water, where the weary climber (me, in 2019) stops to dip their feet in Low Water. Near this point, you can believe you’ve nearly completed the climb, only to be faced with the ‘tough bit’, a sheer cliff where the real climb begins. ‘The topmost peak of Kanchenjunga was directly above the explorers... All this time the explorers had been climbing up the northern side of the peak of Kanchenjunga.’

The account inexplicably misses out what must have been the toughest part of the climb, but then suddenly, ‘they were actually standing by the cairn that marked the highest point of Kanchenjunga...’

Those are all the clues we have of the route to the peak.

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Annotated map of ascent routes

My best guess is the half-way camp was next to Low Water Beck, above the copper mines. But there are some curious gaps in the account. They would have had panoramic views of the copper mines from the camp; why were these not mentioned? Then, before the ‘tough bit’, they must have passed Low Water. It’s a distinctive spot. Any good climbers and campers would have stopped here, topped up their water supply, boiled a billy for some tea. Why did Low Water not get a mention? We will never know.

Today, anyone climbing would choose one of two routes, both originating from the previously mentioned carpark (unless they are so fit they can start from Coniston village). The obvious route, to your right from the carpark, follows a well-laid-out, gently rising track, making the climb look deceptively easy. Indeed, on our climb I viewed an endless stream of tourists believing just that, inappropriately dressed for the colder summit, wearing poor shoes or even thongs (flip-flops to the English). A good pair of trainers is fine, but proper hiking boots are much better, for once the copper mines are in sight, the track takes an evil turn, where the ascent begins in earnest. The easy track turns into a climb, the track covered in a century’s-worth of broken slate which makes every step precarious. The climb becomes one of those nasty experiences where you see what looks like a peak in the distance, but once you get there and over a ridge, it is only to see a repeat, with another long climb, and so on.

An hour later, a flat area is reached, with the remains of

old stone huts, and cables and old slate mines on the surface. The view is wonderful from here, both to Coniston Water and to the old copper mines so far below. A rest is needed here, the tired climber starting to realise that, even now, the real climb is just beginning. Another long and arduous climb eventually reaches Low Water. Here, my 2019 self was exhausted, my feet in the water to cool off. But there’s worse. Looking up, you can see the summit, but oh my! We thought the worst must surely be over, but no, the steep face to the summit presents itself as the sort of place worthy of ropes and pickaxes, not so much a climb as a clamber. I gave up at this point, though my brother carried on and reached the summit. He is fifteen years younger than me, and fit. I was 66, and overweight, so I counted it a win to even reach Low Water.

Returning in 2022 I knew what to expect. This time, I was determined to reach the summit and stand by the cairn where the Swallows and Amazons had stood. Armed with a year’s worth of preparation, exercise and weight loss, I felt ready, but even so, I almost didn’t make it.

We returned to the carpark above Coniston. This year, the weather was wetter and colder, the summit out of sight, enveloped in cloud. This time we ventured to the left from the carpark and followed the Goat Track. Apparently this is an easier track. Laugh if you wish, because I’m sure you can see what’s coming.

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At first it was easier, a gently rising track curling around the south of the Old Man. Then it splits, and we took the track leading north to Torver Common. From here the gradient increases, though still a gentle climb compared to what is to come. Past Torver Common, we reached Goats Water, a chilly spot, etched deep into the surrounding peaks. A glance upward reveals that the real climb has yet to begin, with the Old Man to our right, a long and merciless climb straight ahead.

Eventually reaching the top of this climb, we were faced with another steep climb as we headed towards the peak



The summit of Kanchenjunga showing the cairn of Swallowdale. Note the thick fog and sudden drop beyond it.

and into the clouds. I got the feeling of how it would have been for Titty and Roger, trying to find their way over the moors in thick fog. It was much colder, and the cloud showed itself as heavy rain. I was glad that, this time, I had used walking poles, as I staggered upwards, foot by grudging foot, while my fit brother, bounding like a gazelle, looked impatient with my slow progress. At one point, exhausted, I sat down, broke into tears, and told my brother to carry on without me, and that I'd never reach the summit. Presumably deciding the ground was too tough to bury a body, he stayed with me until I recovered. 'Keep going, you'll be ok, we're nearly at the top,' he would cheerfully say to encourage me, while I thought of dark deeds.

But he was right. A few minutes later, a hazy sight through the clouds solidified into a cairn, and with new-found energy I reached the summit! It was cold, wet and rainy. I stood by the old cairn of *Swallowdale* (there's a new and bigger one adjacent). The fog was still thick. A couple of steps away you couldn't see any ground, just thick fog, but I knew that was the edge of a sheer cliff.

Other natives were there too, swapping climbing stories. We sheltered in the lee of the new cairn for morning tea, then, 'Shall we head down, then?' asked my cheerful brother, as though there were any choice. So we took the very steep slope down towards Low Water, carefully, as the foggy cloud obscured the way. But, half-way down, we left the clouds, emerging into a panoramic view of the land below us. There, still some way away, was Low Water, to which we descended.

I insisted on a halt at Low Water, where I sat with my feet in the water again. Three years later I had completed the circle around Old Man. Comparing photos of me there, feet in the water, in 2019 and 2022, I could see the difference losing 12 kg had made, and it hit me: I had successfully followed in the footsteps of the Swallows and Amazons! A wave of joy swept over me!

The descent is almost as treacherous as the ascent, but it passed and we returned to our car, driving down to Coniston for a welcome lunch! The only question left in my mind is, will I ever get the courage to do it again?



Joy at Low Water! On the way down, Linda gets her feet in Low Water at last, having done the worst of the descent.

Linda has posted a short video of her experiences, which you can watch at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JI-dQqVIUY0>

# Another Swallow

**David Bamford** remembers his beautiful boat.



Skipper and owner David Bamford at the helm with Stuart Allen

Around 1997, I was one of very many people who were retrenched from Melbourne Water. I was fortunate to get a job with a consultancy, so I could make use of my long service leave and the ‘golden handshake’ which I received. I have been attracted to very old-fashioned sailing craft for a long time, and I found an advertisement for a ketch which was built in 1917, though I didn’t find that out until some time later. Although reasonably sound, *Swallow* required quite a lot of work to make her seaworthy. I thought that it would give me some enjoyable times, learning the many crafts and trades involved in bringing the ship back to top condition. And in fact it I enjoyed it for the next fifteen years.

I quickly found that the Perkins engine was seized solid and quite immovable. The gearbox (sort of attached to it) had been welded into ‘forwards’, and the running rigging (all those ropes!) turned to dust in my hands. I don’t plan on boring you with the details of all the parts which I had to work on over the next decade-and-a-half, but some of them might prove interesting.

One of the early mistakes was thinking that I could save some money by buying a second-hand diesel engine: it would run for a bit and then break down. Finding a repairer for that very old engine was difficult, but was finally managed. The end result, after having the same component break many times, was a new engine. This new engine was intended for industrial machinery and needed to be modified to suit installation in a boat. This involved learning how to make patterns for a foundry to cast things like a water-cooled exhaust manifold. My very talented brother did this for me. A chap who worked in the boatyard which I frequented offered to sell me a gearbox which he had recovered from a sunk-

en wreck. It was a thousand bits of gearbox in a fish crate! Arrrgh! Putting it all back together resulted in a very good gearbox. Installing the new engine and gearbox was a bit tense, but it was finally achieved.

The steering mechanism betrayed the previous owner’s farming origins, so I devised a better one, involving a steering wheel, some pulleys and steel cables. My first wheel, a lovely carved wooden one with spokes, was stolen during a break-in. The second one also had spokes but was cast aluminium. Not much good for pretty, but pretty much good for strong.

The interior furniture was ‘farm-shed standard’, so I had the pleasure of making new furniture. Now, a very good friend knew a chap who made his living cutting trees down and would likely help me out. Yes, he was going to knock down a Blackwood in the Dandenong Ranges.

So my pal and I towed a trailer to the appointed spot. Getting the trunk of the tree onto the trailer was quite a



Stuart and the late John Giddy hoisting the TARS Amazon and Swallow burgees

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business, involving an awful lot of heaving and grunting. Now to find a sawmill. Sawmill owners are very cautious about sawing up a tree that came from a public area, because of the risk of finding metal in the middle of a tree which the tree has grown around. I found a company through Yellow Pages who would saw up the log for me. This process was interesting, and within the space of a day the tree-trunk was converted into useful planks. These had to be dried before they could be converted to furniture. The owner of my favourite boatyard found a corner where I could stack the boards and leave them for a year or so to dry out.

There were two masts, two booms, two gaffs and a bowsprit which needed some refurbishment; most of these could be taken home on a borrowed trailer, but the mainmast was another kettle of fish. I tried a number of ideas, but eventually it came to the butt end hanging over the back of the (still borrowed) trailer, and the upper part resting on a pair of ski-bars on my small station wagon, with the mast-head hanging over the front of the car. I was really stretching my luck with the gods to get me from Williamstown to Moorabbin without some newsworthy event taking place. A couple of roadside signs came close to being speared, but the trip was completed without incident. The Boys in Blue must have had better things to occupy them that day, thank goodness!

I had a lovely time fashioning wooden fittings for these spars, and some offcuts of jarrah from the *Enterprize* workshop were put to good use here. The fittings that had been there were sound but very plainly made, and I felt that I could do better.

All of these activities are easy to recount, but in actual fact took a number of years to achieve. I was still working, so they occupied every weekend, and evening work at home as well. Part of the weekend was spent in visiting *Swallow* on her swing mooring at Williamstown to pump out bilge water and evict the seagull nests. The company for which I worked closed the office for four weeks at the end of the year, so that all staff could go on their Christmas holidays. This gave me the opportunity to get *Swallow* hauled into the boatyard for the annual painting of her immersed portion, and maintenance of

the seams of her planking, the most likely place for leaking to happen. This was also the time for changing the engine, if it needed it, which *Swallow's* did. The boatyard which I used in the earlier years of this saga did not have any kind of crane, so I had to cobble together a set of sheerlegs from lengths of timber which I could find lying around in the yard, with the lifting being managed using some of *Swallow's* pulley blocks and odd lengths of rope. It was a scary arrangement, that was for sure! Still, I managed it without damage or injury (more by good luck than good management).



Jan during the sail across Hobson's Bay

Later on, I was able to gain membership of the Royal Yacht Club of Victoria, where facilities were of a better standard than I had become accustomed to. When it came to removing the failed second-hand engine which I had bought and installing the beautiful new engine and its gearbox, I was able to use a proper hoist, which felt like a real luxury. I designed some new fuel tanks, to fit in some tight spaces each side of the engine. These were built by a sheet-metal workshop whom I discovered in Moorabbin's industrial quarter. The industries in this district were a real blessing at this time. Once I had installed

these tanks and given them some contents, I was able to think about starting my new engine. However, there was still much to do: namely, an exhaust pipe and arrangements for cooling the engine. The engine came with an exhaust manifold suited to a farm tractor, so I had to devise one which was water-cooled and led the gases toward the rear of the boat. My talented brother Paul was at this time doing a course in foundry pattern-making, and he was able to do this for me. It was extremely complex, as there had to be passages for the exhaust gas, and, surrounding them, other passages to contain cooling water. Then we had to find a non-ferrous foundry prepared to cast it for us. This was done, but the foundry had to make three castings before they achieved a good result. A special exhaust pipe with a cooling water jacket was also made from copper pipe, and this took the gases out to the stern of the boat. When it came time to start the new engine, I was nervous, but Paul came to assist. When I turned the key, the engine

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sprang into life immediately! I was shocked! My brother laughed at the look on my face, as I had expected a lot of cranking before the engine would start. I had not expected that the manufacturers, Kubota, would have run the engine in the factory before crating it up. The exhaust at its outlet at the back of the boat was as quiet as a modern car. I was very pleased.

Having made the boat go, and being able to steer it, I could now turn to my pile of dried blackwood furniture timber. The furniture was to fit out a saloon amidships and a galley at the entrance companionway. There was to be a quarter-berth aft on the starboard side beside the engine, with a fuel tank under it. Ahead of that was a locker for wet-weather clothing. On the starboard side of the saloon would be a bunk with a large water tank under it. I devised an arrangement for two seats to be able to fold up into the side of this bunk. These seats would face the table, which would be supported at its forward end by a bulkhead and at its aft end by an octagonal post reaching from the cabin sole to the deck-head. On the port side there would be a settee which could convert to a berth. Aft of that would be an arm of the galley containing a sink with a cupboard under it. Further aft again and along the side of the boat would be a worktop and kerosene stove. Beside the stove was space for four drawers. Above the worktop and under the deck there was room for some small lockers for kitchen odds and ends. Aft of the stove I constructed an ice-box for perishables and drinks. Aft of that that was another fuel tank. Both fuel tanks were under the cockpit. Between the ice-box and the quarter-berth there were panels to enclose and quieten the engine. Building all of this took a surprising length of time.

Eventually I could turn my attention to the masts and spars which, by this time, had been refinished. To stand the mainmast Paul and I drove *Swallow* around to the *Enterprize*, as we had arranged with the skipper to hoist the mast from the end of *Enterprize's* yard. This worked very successfully. I had made up shrouds (mast-stays) with eyes (loops) spliced into each end. The splicing of wire rope is very old technology, but quite appropriate for a very old ship like *Swallow*. It is time-consuming and difficult, so is rarely used these days. Another job was converting *Swallow's* navigation and cabin lights to LEDs.

After seven years' work I was finally able to hoist the sails. Restoring a yacht is not a pursuit for wimps or the impatient. Paul and I took *Swallow* out for a sail. We found that she was quite a handful to manoeuvre, and

initially she refused to turn. We learned that we had to steer with the sails rather than the steering-wheel. That was for close quarters work when under engine.

An occasion came when there was to be a celebration of the bicentenary of the first ship to enter Port Phillip. We decided to sail to the south end of the bay to welcome the brig *Lady Nelson* from Hobart. The wind was very light, so we motor-sailed until a loud screeching came from near the engine. Paul looked over the stern and said that there was no activity from the propeller. Oh no! Under sail alone, we proceeded to cross the South Channel. A warning came over the radio to alert shipping to a white squall which had just passed Lonsdale Light, just a few miles away. We frantically tried to lower the mainsail, but it was having none of it. The squall hit us with all our sails up. Swallow leaned over and the top of the mainmast broke off with a loud crack.

Now we could neither hoist sail nor motor. Things were looking bad. A passing boat came over and agreed to tow us to Blairgowrie marina, where we could moor in a berth. Later on, a gentleman offered to take us behind his converted fishing boat to the Royal Yacht Club. My insurance company came good with a new mast, custom-built at Blunt's. But my years with *Swallow* were coming to an end.



VicTARS wait quayside as David hoists the foresail

# Remembering David Goodwin

**Neil Robertson**, Acting Coordinator, TARSNZ, shares some memories of David, who sadly died recently.

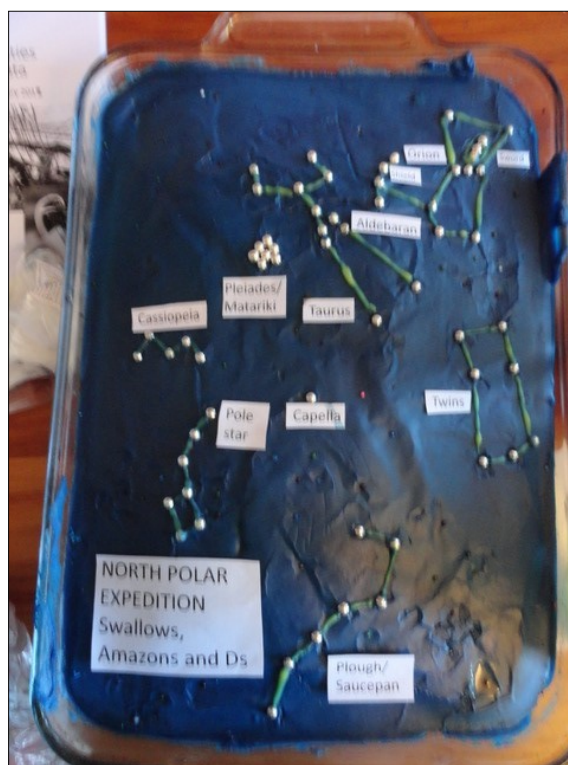


David Goodwin was a talented and enthusiastic member of TARSNZ, who made a major contribution to the success of the January 2018 TARS Ransome Birthday Gathering in Dunedin. He was born in Bulawayo in 1958, and after working in private practice as a land surveyor, he lectured at the University of Zimbabwe until 2003. He then moved with his family (wife Dianne and four daughters) to New Zealand, where he completed a PhD in customary land tenure, and in 2007 became a Senior Lecturer at the School of Surveying in the University of Otago - New Zealand's oldest university. His particular academic interests were in the land tenure area, although with more recent strands of interest in archaeoastronomy and historical position finding, as well as literary cartography - all of which were well demonstrated at the TARS 2018 Gathering.

David gave a presentation at the Otago Museum's Perpetual Guardian Planetarium on 'Arthur Ransome, Astronomy and Celestial Navigation', detailing the research he had made into where and when Ransome had written *Winter Holiday*. He had identified the barn which Dick and Dot had used as an observatory, and, using the coordinates of the barn and the approximate dates involved, had worked out what the night sky

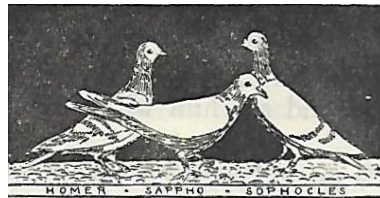
looked like at the appropriate time. It was a fascinating presentation, using the planetarium's projector, and even though David explained that Ransome had obviously used some artistic licence (since Taurus could not have been seen from the barn doorway), it was an amazing feat to show TARS members the exact night sky that Ransome must have seen when he was writing *Winter Holiday*. It was truly an awe-inspiring presentation.

After leaving the planetarium, we all went round to David and Dianne's house for the traditional AR Birthday Tea. They had prepared a sumptuous tea, complete with homemade lemonade - and an astronomically-themed birthday cake. The evening also included a presentation by David about the history of cartography in children's literature with specific reference to Arthur Ransome, drawing on a paper he had written and published four years earlier. A really memorable occasion! The paper - 'Literary Cartography and the Collecting of Place and Experience, with Specific Reference to Collecting Arthur Ransome' - can be viewed at Script and Print 38:3 2014, pages 177-190 (<http://hdl.handle.net/10523/6951>). Apart from being a true Ransome devotee, David Goodwin was also a poet, having been published in the UK and Southern Africa, and a musician. He will be sadly missed at Otago University, and by all in TARSNZ.



David's astronomical birthday Dundee cake





## The Pigeons' Posts



Congratulations to VicTAR Stephen Walls AFSM and Robin Murdoch on their recent marriage! Members will know Stephen from our Zoom sessions and early next year he will be sharing his specialised knowledge and experience with us at a Zoom session, when he will take a Colonel Jolys role to give us a talk on current firefighting strategies. AusTARS wish Stephen and Robin every happiness for their future years together.



QTAR Glenn Kuring is nursing a broken hip and awaiting surgery. As Glenn is Action Man personified we hope some AR reading therapy is helping him through his days of enforced rest.



Congratulations to our AusTARS Secretary, Gill Metz, who was presented with the Australian Fire Service Medal at a ceremony at Government House Melbourne in July. Gill joins Stephen Walls as holders of this prestigious honour.



Former QTAR Paul Rodwell, who moved back to the UK this year is enjoying life in Cornwall and writes to tell of his activities in this issue.



Congratulations to Linda Phillips WATAR on achieving a long-held *S&A* dream! See our front page to read about Linda's exploits.



Jan Allen, our activities deviser, has begun TARS planning again now that she is well on the way to full recovery from a recent and lengthy battle with pneumonia.



Our editor, Phoebe Palmieri, followed the progress of Melbourne CBD's peregrine falcons in their 2022 breeding season. This year they successfully reared four chicks. Her husband, Santo, has been helping the medical professions with their retirement funds this year and is now recuperating from his most recent surgery. We wish him a healthy 2023!



Our AusTARS Library has had some recent additions. A full set of the green hardbacks, previously owned by her father, has been kindly donated by Wendy Lee, of Peregrine School in Tasmania. The school is a long-term member of AusTARS, courtesy of the generosity of TasTAR, Bronwyn Tyson, and holds its own full set of the books for use by the students. The books mostly have dustjackets of various kinds, original, glued, etc., and may be borrowed by members. Editions are as follows: *S&A* 1967, *SD* 1968, *PD* 1943, *WH* 1969, *CC* 1976, *PP* 2007, *WD* 1968, *SW* 1974, *BS* 1968, *ML* 1945, *PM* 1967, *GN?* 1973.

Contact David Stamp <[destamp@optusnet.com.au](mailto:destamp@optusnet.com.au)> if you wish to borrow anything from our Library. If any TARSNZ members would like a copy of the Library catalogue, contact David or the Secretary <[gm\\_squared@hotmail.com](mailto:gm_squared@hotmail.com)> .

# Buzzards, bitterns and grebes in Britain and down under

Another beautifully illustrated article from **Garry Wood**.



A pair of Common Buzzards soaring over snow-covered hills of the Lake District in Britain

Arthur Ransome mentioned many birds in the twelve books of his canon, culminating with the Great Northern Diver in the final book. However, there were three birds of those written about, in which he seemed to have a particular interest, the Buzzard, the Bittern, and the Great Crested Grebe. We therefore look at the background of these birds in Britain, followed by those present in Australasia.

## Buzzards in Britain (hawk family)

In *Winter Holiday*, while taking part in a crossing of a mountainous area of the Lake District given the name 'Greenland' by the Swallows and Amazons, Dick Callum in the breezy, cold air heard a noise that reminded him of the mewing of kittens. Then he spotted two large brown-coloured birds gliding around the summit of some grey crags, both with only a slow flap of their wings. When he asked Peggy what they were, she told him they were buzzards calling to each other, and there were nearly always some of them there. Dick had never seen them before, except as pictures in books. He thought he could make out a nest on the ledged wall of the crag.

Three species of buzzard occur in Britain, all belonging to the Hawk family, which contains other birds of prey such as eagles and sparrow hawks. British buzzard species are the Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, the Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*, and the Honey-Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* (Fitter and Richardson 1952). AR does not give any indication of which species Dick saw, but it would be unlikely to be the Honey-Buzzard as they are rare visitors. Both the Common and Rough-legged are widespread in Britain, particularly in the western regions, so it would be one of these. Had Dick been closer he would have seen their tail feathers, which differ be-

tween the two. Rough-Legged can also be identified by their leg feathers, which the Common do not have. When Dick asked Peggy about the nests they made, she said 'any old sticks', which would be much the correct answer. Buzzards in Britain were declining in the past century, but with decreased persecution and more protection they are now recovering in numbers (Anonymous 2021).

## Australian buzzards

Two species of buzzard occur in Australia, both different to those occurring in Britain. The Black-Breasted Buzzard, *Hamirostra melanosternon* is the most common, being found both inland and on the coast of New South Wales, Queensland, Northern Territory, and Western Australia (Pizzey and Knight 2007). Although commonly referred to as a buzzard, there is some question that rather being a true buzzard they may be more closely related to the Square-Tailed Kite *Lophoictinia isura* (ntraptors 2017). However, the Black-Breasted is an impressive, large raptor, which soars effortlessly on long wings of a slight v-shape, and with strongly feathered wing-tips, which can be upswept like the wing-tips of a present-day jet airliner. In both plane and bird, this serves the purpose of reducing drag and giving more lift. In flight low over treetops, its short tail and long wings give the bird a rocking motion (ntraptors 2017). Its general body colour is chestnut brown, darker on the underside, with a black breast. Its wing primaries (outer wing feathers) are black at the tips and have a white band further in. It has a harsh, scraping-sound voice, and sometimes a loud yelp. Their nests, like those of other buzzards, form a large, shallow, tangled bundle of sticks, in live or dead trees.

The other buzzard species, Eastern Honey-Buzzard



An Australian Black-Breasted Buzzard in its typical buzzard nest of old sticks

Continued on next page

*Pernis ptilorhynchus*, is only an occasional visitor to Australia, although common in Asia.

Buzzards are not present in New Zealand, one of the few places in the world where they do not occur.



An Australian Black-Breasted Buzzard in flight

### British bitterns (heron family)

Dick Callum's acquaintance with bitterns seems to have started with *Coot Club*, when on Ranworth Broad Dick heard a sound that he thought was a foghorn, and Tom Dudgeon told him it was a bittern. Then, aboard *Teasel* moored in a dyke off Horsey Mere, he got his first glimpse of a bittern, and listened to the booming of several at night. A few days later one was sighted in flight over the Upton reeds.

Then, in *The Big Six*, Tom, Joe, Bill and Pete were dismayed to hear the old eelman tell how he had taken eggs and shot many bitterns in his youth. Their attempts to explain to him how this had nearly ended the presence of bitterns on the Broads fell on deaf ears. Efforts by the Coot Club and other organisations to protect the bitterns slowly brought them back, but even by 1997 they were on the brink of extinction (Anonymous 2022). Fortunately, efforts by United Kingdom conservation groups brought the number of birds back to a sustainable population by 2017.



A British bittern fishing on the Norfolk Broads

British bitterns, *Botaurus stellaris*, when they want to hide, have a remarkable ability to stand motionless with their bills held skywards, so when in a reedbed, camouflaged with their brown streaked feathers, they are difficult to see (Fitter and Richardson 1952). Only the male birds, fishing on the Norfolk Broads, make their booming sound (which can carry for several kilometres), and they do so only in spring, (Anonymous 2022).

### Australasian bitterns

The Australasian Brown Bittern *Botaurus poiciloptilus* occurs both in Australia and New Zealand, but is a different species to that in Britain. In Australia it is found in New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, and southern parts of Western Australia, primarily in swampy areas where there is thick vegetation in which it can hide. When disturbed it vanishes into thick cover, pointing its bill skywards as with the British bittern. Its overall brown and black streaked colour, like old leaves, helps it to remain unseen. Voice booms like a distant foghorn, often at night (Pizzey and Knight 2007).

In New Zealand, the Australasian bittern lives in swamps, riversides and lakes, particularly where a rush called raupo or bulrush *Typha orientalis* grows, and sometimes also in mangroves. The tall growing raupo, particularly when its foliage dies, turns a russet brown which matches the light and dark brown streaks of the bittern's plumage. Thus, when the bittern freezes in its upright position it is difficult to see. Broken bits of raupo also form the nest made by the bird. The male makes the typical booming evening call in spring and early summer (Moon 1992). Because of the draining of swamps, bitterns are not as common in New Zealand as they used to be (Parkinson and Cox 1990).

Another species of bittern occurs in Australia, but not in New Zealand. This is the Black Bittern, *Ixobrychus flavicollis*, which is coloured dark brown to black. The head has a conspicuous white, then golden-yellow, patch from the throat down either side of the neck, until it turns to the brown of the under-body. It is smaller than the Australasian bittern and has a more slender head and neck. It lives primarily in the more tropical coastal areas of Australia, near water, and where it can hide in foliage when in danger. Its untidy nests are on tree branches over water. It makes a loud 'Whoo' sound (Pizzey and Knight 2007).

### British Great Crested Grebes (Grebe family)

Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* are beautiful waterbirds, as demonstrated by AR's sketch of several on page 169 of *The Big Six*. Their plumage varies a bit

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page      Buzzards, bitterns and grebes  
between summer and winter, but is generally grey in colour with the fore-part of the head and neck white. The rear part of the head is chestnut brown to orange, and the top of the head has a pointed black crest.

AR mentions Great Crested Grebes in both *Coot Club* and *The Bix Six*. These birds occur in most of Britain, but nearly became extinct in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when they were hunted for their head plumes for use in the millinery trade (Anonymous 2022). The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds was set up to help protect the species, and so with this they made a gradual recovery. They breed in inland waters, particularly reservoirs, lakes and rivers, building nests of dead vegetation material just above water level (Fitter and Richardson 1952). They bare wary of people and not easily approached. In *The Bix Six*, aboard the *Death and Glory*, Pete with his big telescope sighted a Great Crested Grebe, and Joe did his best to get near to it for Dick to take a photograph, but the bird would dive away too quickly.

### Australasian Great Crested Grebes

The Australasian Great Crested Grebe has the same scientific name, *Podiceps cristatus*, as that in Britain, and looks the same, but is regarded by ornithologists as a subspecies (Anonymous 2022). It occurs both in Australia and in New Zealand. As it is not a strong flyer, it is a bit of a mystery how it got to New Zealand. Perhaps many years ago examples were blown across the Tasman Sea in strong south-westerly storms. Several other Australian bird species such as the Royal Spoonbill, Australian Coot, Cattle Egret, and White-faced Heron have been self-introduced to New Zealand by flight in the past century.

In Australia the Great Crested Grebe is found in the more temperate eastern states, Tasmania, and coastal Western Australia. It is confined to wetlands, by borders of lakes, reservoirs, swamps and inlets, where it swims



With its dagger-like bill, an Australian Black Bittern hunts for its prey in the shallows of a Queensland estuary

strongly on the surface, frequently diving and swimming fast under water (Pizzey Knight 2007). In general, it only comes on to land to make a nest, which is a mass of decayed vegetation and mud anchored to semi-submerged or fully-submerged objects. Population in



With its plumage matching the raupo rushes on a riverside in New Zealand, an Australasian bittern, motionless and holding its bill towards the sky, is hard to see

Australia is stable.

In New Zealand Great Crested Grebes are present only in the South Island and occur only on alpine and sub-alpine lakes, in particular Lakes Heron, Alexandrina and Wanaka. Numbers of the birds were never very high, and during the 20<sup>th</sup> century they dropped down to about 200 individuals because of the disturbing of nests, drainage of wetlands, and illegal shooting (Parkinson and Cox 1990), as well as predation of eggs and fledglings by stoats, ferrets and cats (Littlewood 2021). Conservationists then got involved and have arrested this decline.

Great Crested Grebes do not commonly nest in groups in New Zealand, but recently more than 60 breeding pairs set up a large cluster of nests in the outlet stream of Lake Alexandrina, near Te Kapo (Littlewood 2021). Visitors come to the lake to see the birds, the males and females of which may show an amorous courtship display (Moon 1992). To prevent unnecessary disturbance by visitors, a temporary fence was constructed.

Similarly, birds attempting to nest on the edges of Lake Wanaka were having their nests flooded or sunk with strong winds, and with the wash from pleasure boats. To combat this, floating artificial nest platforms made of wood or polyurethane foam (as used with surfboards), were anchored near the shore. These floated so their top-side decks rode well above water level. The decks were

Continued on next page

covered with a heap of cut vegetation, small sticks and mud for the bird to make its nest. The floats have become popular for nesting, resulting in a promising increase in the residing Great Crested Grebe population (Schweigman 2022).

Readers of AR's novels, particularly in Britain, frequently comment that the books kindled their interests in small boats, sailing and outdoor activities. The same probably occurred with those who had an interest in birds, and they would become involved in bird protection, just as Dick and Dorothea Callum and the Coot Club members did in the stories.

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## Events calendar 2023

### Trans-Tasman Zoom sessions

Sunday January 15th      NZ 3.00 pm AEST 5.00 pm WA 8.00 pm      Celebrate AR's Birthday!

May 20 or 21, August 19 or 20, late November - dates and guests to be announced

### VicTARS activities

PROPOSED (dates and activities may alter.) Events are open to all AusTARS members.

Sunday January 22nd	11.30 am	AR Birthday Party	Emerald
Friday February 10th	7.30 pm (AEST)	Annual General Meeting	Zoom
Saturday February 18th	11.00 am - 3.30 pm	Lake Wendouree Day	Ballarat
Sunday March 19th	12 noon - 3.30 pm	Rowing up the Amazon	Fairfield
Saturday April 29th	11.00 am - 3.00 pm	Kanchenjunga Picnic Day	Mount Macedon
Saturday June 3rd	11.00 am - 3.00 pm	Pirates and Plays Day	Emerald
Sunday July 16th	1.00 pm - 4.00 pm	Cosy Winter Mystery Afternoon	Emerald
Saturday August 12th	11.00 am - 3.30 pm	AR and the Romany Life	Tecoma
Saturday September 16th	11.30 am - 3.00 pm	Roses and Birds Day	Werribee
Sunday October 15th	1.00 pm - 4.00 pm	Dick's Butterfly Day	Cranbourne Botanic Gardens
Saturday November 25th	11.30 am - 4.00 pm	Mining and Missee Lee Day	Bendigo
Saturday December 9th	11.00 am - 4.00 pm	Christmas Party	Ivanhoe East

# Dick's nature notes from High Topps Reptile Park, November

Gwyn Johnson's garage snake (see last issue) has moved on, but she has plenty of other fauna to watch.



Bush turkeys on mound

For the past few years, a male brush turkey has taken up residence in the garden areas near my house, and each year he has built a huge nesting mound. All the mulch from garden beds around is painstakingly removed, bit by bit, and added to make the mound. Female brush turkeys are invited to come to lay their eggs in the mound, and then are shooed off with pecks by the male Mound Manager, who takes over from there.

Now we have a large goanna nosing around the village and sniffing out eggs. The turkey mound has had four separate layings of eggs over the last few weeks. I don't know if it is the same female or different ones. It will be interesting if the goanna comes to raid the nest and the turkey comes to defend his territory. It could be quite a fight.

Kookaburras sit on the tree above the turkey nest, waiting for the Uber Eats to emerge from the mound. The little hatchlings will be born in a battleground. So I suppose the females do have to lay twenty-plus eggs in the hope of a couple of chicks surviving.

Yesterday afternoon we were watching a couple of water dragons chasing each other around. We weren't sure if it was a prelude to mating or just playing, or if it was two males establishing their leadership.

Now that the tree snake has moved on from our garage, I was very pleased to see the leaf-tailed gecko back in the garage, where I had relocated it after it got into our house.

Most of our big copper skinks were eaten by the snake but luckily a few little ones have now hatched. Unfortunately, a smaller goanna was in the garden the other day and dug up a nest full of skink eggs and ate them all. I saw a very nice healthy-looking blue-tongued lizard in the garden a couple of weeks ago.

Bandicoots and wallabies still call our garden their home territory. We don't have any little birds at all, apart from a few Noisy Miners. Everything else that visits is big: Channel-billed Cuckoo, Koel Cuckoo, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, King Parrot, Lorikeets, Black and White Cockatoos, Kookaburras, Currawongs, Ravens, Magpies and Wattlebirds. I heard an Olive-backed Oriole, well camouflaged in the bush. So there is quite a lot going on in our quiet bushland setting.



...and on the doorstep

# Pike

**Patrick Armstrong** tells us more about the famous fish, following Garry Wood's article about the fisherman of the Cachalot in our last issue .



'Pike' from *British Fresh-water fishes*, depicted by A F Lydon, engraved by Benjamin Fawcett, 1879.

In *The Big Six*, Joe, Bill and Pete caught 'the world's whopper', a pike that weighed in at 'thirty pound and a half' (13.8 kg), and in due course it was stuffed, mounted and displayed above the mantelpiece of *The Roaring Donkey* pub. There are indeed pubs in Norfolk where stuffed pike can be seen. Some of them were over 30 lb in weight when caught, but a quick glance over the internet suggests that there are fewer than formerly: it seems the stuffed fish and other 'dead things' are now regarded as somewhat 'politically incorrect' and not what some folk want to see when downing their pints (or their martinis) and eating their meals.

Pike fishing remains popular, however, and in January 2022 the *Eastern Daily Press* reported the landing of a pike weighing 33 lb and 13 oz (15.34 kg) from a Norfolk river. The largest pike ever recorded as having been caught in the UK was apparently that landed by a Mr Roy Lewis at the Llandegfedd Reservoir in South Wales in 1992, weighing 46 lb 13 oz (21.23 kg). A large pike can approach a metre in length. The largest pike ever caught was said to be some 55 lb 1 oz (25 kg), captured in Lake Grefeen, Germany in 1986. Recent records of slightly larger fish from the Czech Republic and Bulgaria have not been universally accepted by anglers.

Such mighty fish may be between fifteen and twenty years old. It has been suggested that the species can live

to some fifty years.

The northern pike (*Esox lucius*), found throughout northern Europe (and also in North America), is well adapted to its role as apex predator in rivers, including slightly brackish rivers, and deep lakes. The blotchy, dark green coloration conceals it in patches of river vegetation, and it has an elongate streamlined body,

and extremely sharp teeth. Besides fish it consumes waterfowl, small mammals and amphibians. It is suggested that the English name comes from that of the mediaeval weapon, a long (3-7 m) wooden spear (often ash-wood) with a sharp metal point.

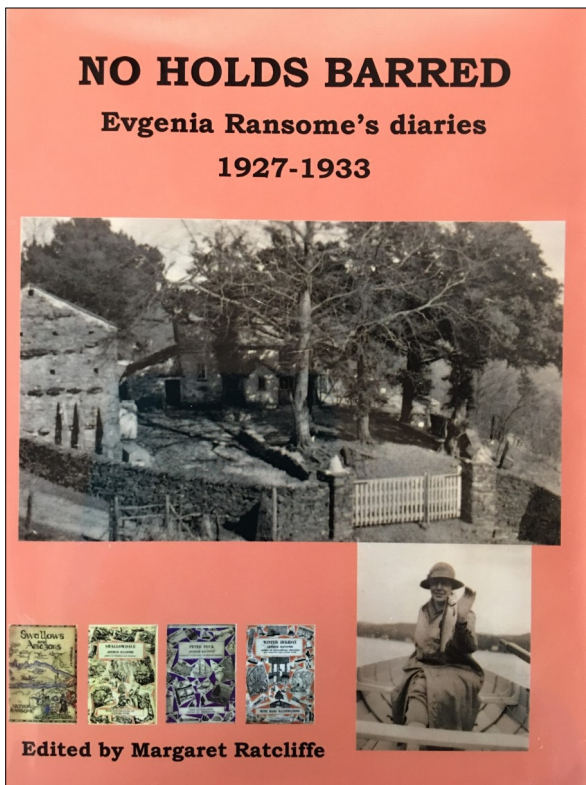
Pike when caught these days are often released after being measured and weighed; this is perhaps partly because the fashion for massive trophy fish has fallen away, the emphasis being now on conservation and sustainability, but also because they are not good eating:

The wary luce midst wrack and rushes hid,  
The scourge and terror of the scaly brood,  
Unknown at friendship's hospitable board.  
Smokes 'midst the smoky tavern's coarsest food.

This piece of doggerel, and the illustration above, come from the book *British Fresh-Water fishes*, authored by the Reverend William Houghton, a distinguished Victorian naturalist. It is possible that Ransome knew of the work, it was still often referred to in the days when he was doing his fishing. The incorporation of the roles of fisherman, parson and naturalist into a single person was not altogether unknown. Leonard Jenyns, Vicar of Swafham Bulbeck, on the Suffolk-Cambridgeshire borders, described the fish specimens brought back by Charles Darwin from his Voyage on HMS *Beagle*. Leonard knew the fish of Eastern England well.

# No holds barred: Evgenia Ransome's diaries 1927-1933

David Stamp reviews a new addition to the AusTARS Library



Well, by now you've probably been aware of, even if you haven't read, the many biographies of Arthur Ransome. Now, perhaps to offer balance, contradiction or corroboration, there is a new volume, published this year, which contains most of the diary entries of Evgenia, Arthur's Russian-born wife and companion.

The book, *No Holds Barred*, is edited by Margaret Ratcliffe, author of several Arthur-related books, and it covers the period 1927-1933, Evgenia's most productive diary-writing years. During this time Arthur was working as a correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* newspaper, as well as being engaged in the writing of the first two *Swallows and Amazons* stories. While Arthur was busy Evgenia was concerning herself with day-to-day and household matters, organising their social calendar, and having many strong opinions, some of which may have aligned with those of her husband.

In reading the book several things stand out: dissatisfaction with the weather, whether it be too hot or too cold; impatience with other people's characters and foibles; appreciation and enjoyment of being with many other people; problems with their motor car (hint: don't buy a Trojan!); their consciousness of their position in society; Evgenia's and Arthur's mutual problems with ill health, with their frequent visits to and by the doctor (the Editor

notes that '*If I were unkind, I would make the point here, that throughout their marriage, Arthur and Evgenia appeared to compete to see who could be the more ill. But that would be unkind.*

I would think that most diaries are written to act as aides-memoire for the writer, and are not necessarily intended for wider reading; with the many opinions expressed, this would have to have been the case. Many people mentioned would have been devastated to read of themselves if the diaries had happened to come their way at some later time. Nevertheless, written as they were, they provide fascinating reading. It is a pity that for later readers there is little mention of the background political, economic and other-than-personal social conditions of their time, at least as far as these affected the Ransomes.

Two chapters of the book are devoted to the first two of the Ransomes' three holidays in hired yachts on the Broads (April-May 1931 and April-May 1933), and it is interesting to delve into Evgenia's and Arthur's separate accounts, which in many ways are similar, so that one is tempted to think that there could have been a bit of collusive writing. On 29 April, 1931, Arthur has added to Evgenia's diary '*Attempted to murder Arthur by dropping the boom on his head. Failed, but only just. Better luck next time.*' Arthur's note about the same incident (*Ransome at Sea - Notes from the Chart Table*, 1995) is '*Here topping lift left unbelayed. Peak slipped and boom came down on back of skipper's skull. ?if cracked or too dense? - later feels cracked.*'

While Arthur tends to concentrate on sailing technicalities, tide times, places visited, distances sailed, fish caught and birds seen, Evgenia observes more from a non-sailing visitor's point of view, and in doing so involves the reader in their holidays. Both mention sailing in strong winds on Oulton Broad, with Evgenia admitting to tying to the quay '*not without a bump or two and a scratch or two,*' while Arthur lets this event pass him by; perhaps, in *Coot Club*, when he writes that Tom Dudgeon, also in heavy weather, brings *Teasel* alongside without so much as touching, he is atoning for his own earlier misjudgement.

This is a book I enjoyed reading, with its inclusion of the visit to Aleppo, life in the Lake District, and frequent insertions of contextual quotations from the *Swallows and Amazons* books. There is a copy in the AusTARS library; please let me know if you wish to borrow it.



# Butterwort, *Pinguicula vulgaris*

This time, **Patrick Armstrong** takes us into the world of flora.

Dick Callum was a good ornithologist, and quite competent with insects, geology and astronomy. Botany does not seem to have been his strongest suit.

That first day in the western Isles, in *Great Northern?*, while Captain Flint and the older Swallows and Amazons were cleansing the *Sea Bear* in Scrubbers Cove, the younger members of the crew were exploring on their own. On being shown a small purple flower by Dorothea, he identified it rather tentatively: "It's a butterwort, I think. But I don't know for certain."

He was right. His attention was drawn to the stickiness of the species' leaves and he immediately identified it as a 'fly-catcher'.

Butterwort, also sometimes known as bog violet, or marsh violet, can be found in damp areas such as bogs, fens, wet heaths and in rock crevices. The peaty uplands of the Highlands and Islands of western Scotland are a typical habitat. Such acid soils have a low nutrient status, and butterwort is a member of that rather small category of carnivorous, or insect-consuming, flowering plants. Nitrogen and phosphorus extracted from the soil are supplemented by nutrients extracted from the proteins of insects (and spiders, and other small creatures) that alight on the leaves.

The plant typically has up to three funnel-shaped purple flowers. These blossoms attract insects to land on the star-shaped cluster of greenish-yellow leaves at the base of a stem which can grow up to 10-15cm in height. The leaves secrete a sticky substance that not only entraps the creatures, but gradually digests them, so that the nourishment that they provide can be absorbed by the plant. The leaves also curl up, further ensnaring the insects.

The name 'butterwort' comes from the fact that it used to be asserted that if the sticky leaves were rubbed on a cow's udder, they had the power to protect it, and the milk, from harm.

It was considered to have magical properties on some of the Hebridean islands. On the Isle Colonsay (probably about 170km due south of

Scrubbers' Cove), it was asserted that if you picked butterwort you would be protected from witches, and if your cows ate it they would be protected from elf arrows!

The species, which occurs widely in on the continent of Europe, including Arctic Scandinavia, and in North America, flowers May-July in the British Isles, exactly the time of year when the *Sea Bear* was sailing around the Minch.



## A day with Lt. Col. Jolys (ret.)

Finally, a real-life get-together for VicTARS. **Jan Allen** reports.

Five keen VicTARS met recently at the CFA station at Riddells Creek, north of Melbourne, for some valuable instruction in early and modern methods of fire-fighting from our own Colonel Jolys, Secretary Gill Metz, who is an experienced Lieutenant in the Riddells Creek CFA Brigade.

Assisted by AusTARS Coordinator Dawn Ciechomski, who is also a member of the Brigade, and also by budding junior members Kaylee and Scarlett (Gill's grand-daughters), Gill took us through the history of the Brigade, and showed us how modern methods for dealing with all types of fires have developed from the early days of flail-type beaters and horse and cart transport to the efficient and highly technically-evolved fire trucks and protective gear of today. Volunteers remain the core of the local firefighting teams and can be called on at any time to assist at fires. Training and updating of skills and qualifications is ongoing for CFA members and the CFA units are often called out to support other emergency services, as in the recent floods.

We were impressed by the equipment and clever design of the trucks and their equipment, but were not envious of Gill having to wear her hot and heavy but very effective protective clothing and mask in the heat of fire situations.



Gill is dwarfed by the truck



The VicTARS gang with the huge fire truck

After a luncheon feast at Gill and Dawn's home, with Dawn's very welcome quiche, scones and brownie supplementing our own packed lunches, we tackled some *Pigeon Post* quizzes and, between us, managed to answer nearly all the Colonel Jolys and fire-related questions thrown at us by Jan. Then it was the turn of Scarlett and Kaylee to instruct us in some actual firefighting methods, via some games they had cleverly devised for us to try. Some of us proved more successful than others in pumping water on the fire or chasing those errant flames that ran away so fast, but our young instructors were very patient with us. We all had a lot of fun and didn't get too wet!

Afternoon tea seemed necessary after our exertions and we managed to squash in those scones and other goodies to rebuild our depleted energies. Everyone had a great day and from it we could better imagine the heat, smoke and fright of that fell fire in *Pigeon Post*, and appreciate and be thankful for the skills and huge body of knowledge informing today's fire services and the people who volunteer and train to save lives and property. We left the pirate flag flying proudly from its pole in the front garden and hope to visit again some time. Many thanks to Gill, Dawn and the girls for planning such an informative and enjoyable event and for their terrific hospitality.

# Lover's leap: Trail-blazing in the Exumas

**John Parsloe** tells us about another of his adventures

The objective seemed simple enough: create a series of tracks, on an uninhabited tropical island in the Caribbean, that would attract passing yachties ashore to explore.

We were meeting in the national office of the Bahamas National Trust (BNT) in Nassau in early 1989 on my first visit to the Bahamas. I had flown in from London a week before via Miami to Freeport on Grand Bahama. I then flew on to the Bahamas capital, Nassau, to be briefed at the Bahamas Operation Raleigh Headquarters. The Bahamas Operation Raleigh Expedition Leader had come up with a cunning scheme for me to be the Project Leader for a politically tricky project out in the Little Exumas on the edge of a National Park (the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park). Imagination was going to be required if it was to succeed. As I was an Expedition-Leader-in-waiting, they thought I was the ideal person for the challenge!

I had been appointed the final Expedition Leader for Operation Raleigh (an international organisation for young men and women to carry out worthy tasks around the world. They were known as 'venturers'). I needed to fill in time before joining the sail-training three-masted barque, *Lord Nelson*, in Freeport. This was to give me the opportunity to meet my future crew of young men and women venturers who were currently working on various worthy projects around the Bahamas, before our late winter sailing adventure across the North Atlantic. While passing through London from New Zealand (to visit the Operation Raleigh International Headquarters to learn the 'dos and don'ts' of an expedition leader), Sylvia had given me a toy parrot she had made and named 'Nelson' (she was at the time in London on a toy design course). Nelson the parrot became a useful tool to help me break the ice when initially meeting my future venturers.

At the BNT office I was introduced to Peggy Hall, a Director, who was also the Park Warden for the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park. Peggy was a formidable woman of the type you might see in an Agatha Christie novel, in pith-helmet and khaki shorts, very much as the leader of Operation Raleigh looked when out and about visiting projects in this tropical climate!

They briefed me on the Bahamas political scene. This was a delicate subject as, at the time, there was a United States warrant out for the arrest of the Prime Minister. He was wanted in the US for indictment on matters to do with the illegal drug trade. It was rumoured that many of

the schools and roads on the main islands had been built from illicit funds from drug money.

My working brief was more straightforward – to clear and cut tracks, produce attractions on Hall's Pond Cay and, in general, make an uninhabited island appealing enough to entice passing yachties to come ashore and explore during their Caribbean cruises. The former modest hotel on the island had burnt down in 1958. The family who had owned it had left the island to the nation to become part of the surrounding Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park *if* the Bahamas Government could show it would maintain it. Thirty years on, this had still not happened and it was now my job to try and achieve the family's wish. I would have roughly two and a half weeks to complete it.



Nelson-the-parrot: 'Banking in the Bahamas'

Before starting the project, I needed to visit San Salvador Island, 317 kilometres to the South West of Nassau. There I was to see some of my future venturer crew in action. They had been slaving away in the jungle creating tracks on an old cotton plantation site. So the next morning I was off in a small floatplane, just large enough for the pilot, my pack and me. The venturers' work was nearly complete and we would all be moving together to the island project in the Exumas for more slash-&-bash track making.

*Continued on next page*



A Lord Nelson Victory recreational tug

#### Lover's leap

We sailed from San Salvador on an old oilrig tender tug, the *Sea Hawler*. It proved a long hot day, sheltering from the sun under a tarpaulin, lying or sitting on our gear out on the lengthy low

stern deck where anchors and cables had once been stowed in its previous life, as we rocked and rolled our way across the blue Caribbean Sea in gentle choppy seas on this glorious blue-sky day to our island.

Yes, *our island!* We had arrived. There was no budget for the project so we would need to improvise, employing the materials around us, the flotsam and jetsam of the sea. Anything lying on the beaches would be useful, including fallen palm tree fronds. The small team of young men and women venturers would be busy, using all their skills, talents and imagination to achieve the goals.

The east sides of the Exumas were exposed to the elements from the North Atlantic, while the west sides were sheltered, so this was the route most pleasure craft took, an idyllic passage north or south along the Exuma islands chain. We would need to carry out a survey of passing yachts and launches, and create some attraction on a beach visible from out at sea to lure crew members ashore to investigate further. I was looking at it through boaties' eyes. Positioning the bait was critical. An enticing large sign would be required. If successful, word of mouth would encourage others to also visit the island.

But now it was time to get ashore off the *Sea Hawler* and settle in. The tug positioned itself as close to the beach as it safely could. There was already a party based on the island from the main Bahamas Operation Raleigh Expedition. They were carrying out a scientific diving survey of the reefs offshore to count and classify the types of fish and corals in the area. Already they had carried out a mapping of the nearby seabed and were currently creating a snorkelling trail of numbered attractions for visiting divers to follow. Their inflatable was now standing off to come alongside our tug to transport us and gear ashore to the beach.

The welcoming committee also included some venturers I'd previously met who had arrived a few days earlier by

tug from Freetown. When I first arrived in the Bahamas at Freeport for acclimatization and a training period at an old disused American air force missile base, I met the 30 venturers who would be sailing back with me on the *Lord Nelson* North Atlantic crossing. They had then been dispersed in three groups of 10 to various projects around the Bahamas. This particular group, and the diving team venturers, had already established a base camp in the old hotel, Exuma Cays Club, formerly used by passing yachties. An earlier Operation Raleigh project had renovated the Club building, making it into habitable accommodation again for use by succeeding projects, so it was a short and easy walk for us to get our gear up from the beach to 'Club Raleigh' with a view. After settling in, we had a pleasant evening getting to know each other before retiring for an early night after the wearying hot day's sea-travel.

After breakfast the next morning we had a planning meeting to discuss our assignment and how to tackle it. A 'recce' would be needed to get a feel for the island and what it had to offer - where to clear or create tracks, any special features, views, what resources might be available on the beaches. Small groups were formed to go off exploring the island. One group was given the less physical task of looking out for passing craft from a headland near Club Raleigh to observe what kind of people were on board and their activities. When in Nassau at the BNT meeting I had obtained a simple photocopy plan of the island. Now, before setting off, each group copied the area they were to explore onto a piece of paper. I also wanted to get a good overview of the island myself, so set off with two others for a fast excursion to the highest points and to check out a key beach on both east and west coasts.

We headed for the west coast beach first as it was closest, and found that it was pristine. This was the coast most cruising boats travelled along, as it was more sheltered and more appealing to look at. The east coast beach was not, however, since prevailing winds had blown ashore rubbish and the sludge from oil tankers cleaning out their tanks many miles away. Although it was illegal to do this near the islands, obviously some did. This was not a beach any tourist would want to stroll along. Great care was required as we walked along it, the sludge camouflaged by the sand. Making the walk even more challenging was the fact that foam blown ashore off the waves covered both sludge and sand.

But there were useful items: driftwood, broken pieces of smashed wooden boats, fishing buoys, nets and lengths of rope - even an old lifebuoy. All this free material

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Lover's leap

would be useful when making the information notice boards and attractions.

From one of the high points we got a good overview of where tracks could go. From my map, some already existed but had become very overgrown through years of neglect. The significant ones would need clearing to be useable again. If frequently used by passing boaties they were less likely to become completely overgrown again and the twice a year visit by the maintenance team would ensure they remained in good order.

The survey of passing boats had shown that many of those cruising on board were portly mature folk while the crews tended to be young and athletic-looking (both groups were well tanned!). As the portly groups were probably those in control of where the boats went and what they did, our tracks would need to sidle along the hillsides to maintain a reasonably level path with few steep ups and downs.

We commenced our track-making. A small team surveyed and marked out possible routes from one significant viewing spot to another. While doing one of these exploratory track-making surveys we discovered a small shallow pond *not* marked on my map. The surrounding bush concealed its edge - perhaps the reason it had not been spotted on aerial mapping photographs. Wading in the pond were some pink flamingos. This proved big news when we reported it back by radio to Op Raleigh HQ in Nassau. The last time they had been recorded on this cay was in 1944. This discovery of the pink flamingos, the National Bird of the Bahamas, brought in the Bahamas Expedition Leader for a visit to check on progress. It was even important enough for the beleaguered PM to pay us a brief surprise visit to see them for himself!

Once boaties had been enticed ashore, the track off the beach would need to appear an easy walk and worth doing, despite the initial steep part. An attraction at the top would be key. Then something else would be needed along the track to ensure they continued their walk on the higher ground, including views looking down on the beach where their craft were anchored

So, firstly, to lure the passing crews ashore. From scavenged materials, an attractive sun shelter with notice board was assembled on the nearest beach to passing boats. Old driftwood tree branches made the supports and old planks and ply the noticeboard, with palm tree fronds for the roof. A big visible arrow was burnt with a poker into a plank, pointing at an angle upwards towards the start of the track from the beach, and beside it a smaller burnt-on message, *40 steps to Rest-A-While seat.*

The days passed as the tracks were cleared and signage created – *20 paces to Lover's Lookout* - a plank seat in a secluded spot with a view over another pristine beach. Then, *100 paces to Pink Flamingo Lookout* - a plank seat overlooking the pond with the recently rediscovered pink flamingos.

For an interlude from our own work, one day I took a small team of slash-&-bashers in the divers' Searider inflatable over to our neighbouring cay to the north, Warderick Wells. This was reputed to be the area where pirates had lurked, unseen by the passing ships. When tall masts were sighted the pirates would race out and pillage and plunder. These days it is where the new headquarters building for the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park is situated – the first within the park. It is also where the Park Warden is now based. (Warderick Wells Cay needed some new tracks and Peggy Hall had asked for Operation Raleigh assistance. )



*Pillage and plunder off the Spanish Main (from The Captains' Wives by Bob Darroch)*

While my team started on their new track-creating project, I went off to visit Peggy Hall. Peggy invited me on board her floating home, a 37-foot 'Lord Nelson' class tug named *Moby*, where I was introduced to her dog, Powerful. *Moby*, with its shallow draft and wonderful accommodation, was the perfect home for its owner and her dog out in her Exuma Park. She was, like the Director-General of Operation Raleigh, a charismatic leader.

After this very pleasant interlude eating her homemade thick tasty sandwiches and drinking cups of tea while a watchful Powerful looked on, Peggy took me ashore to inspect the new headquarters building for the park, just recently commissioned. I then went on to see how the venturers were progressing with their new track towards Boo Boo Hill from the Park HQ. They had become professionals with the slash-&-bash track-making tech-

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Lover's leap

nique! I decided to get a better overview, as suggested by the Park Warden. So back to the beach and a more direct route on an existing path up Boo Boo Hill. A thought-provoking sign on a bench at the top (*Do Not Regret Getting Old, It Is A Privilege Denied Of Many*) that made me think of the signs we were creating on our island – a somewhat different approach!

So the days passed as the tracks were cleared and signage created – *40 paces to Lover's Leap* - a shortcut back down to the main beach via a sand dune.

We also had our distractions. One afternoon I looked up and saw a small Cessna-type aeroplane flying south down the higher coastline of our island. This was the first aeroplane we had seen since arriving on Hall's Pond Cay. The plane was quite low, only about 50 feet higher than where I was standing by the old hotel near the west coast cliffs. The Cessna quickly disappeared from sight behind the bush and palm trees near the cliffs at the southern end of the island. Then all was quiet again.

But the peace was only momentary. There was now a faint thunder-thunder-thunder sound, getting louder and closer. A large helicopter came into view to our north, off the coast. It was a lot higher than the plane we had just seen, but it was heading in the same southerly direction. As it came closer we could see its markings: 'U.S. Coast Guard'. It was obviously following or chasing the small aeroplane we had seen. We all became interested and ran to the edge of the nearby cliffs to get a better view to the south, down the coast.

The helicopter passed by, but then changed direction slightly to head towards the south end of *our* island and hover, slowly descending to the treeline. We couldn't see what it was they were interested in but a crew member was lowered by wire and disappeared out of sight below the trees. A little later, he reappeared, being hoisted back up into the helicopter. He must have taken another wire with him for there was now something hanging below the helo. The helicopter slowly regained altitude and the dangling object came into view - it was part of an aeroplane! Gaining speed, the helicopter with its cargo flew back up the coast towards us and then away to the north. As it passed we could see, on the wire below it, the fuselage and one wing of the Cessna we had seen earlier. The small aeroplane must have been fleeing the helicopter and run out of fuel before trying to crash land on the sea.

We had witnessed a Bahamas drug bust!

We returned to our track-making duties. There were visitors. The first had been the Bahamas' Expedition Lead-

er, arriving on the small floatplane to check on progress. This was followed by the PM's visit. A week later the chairman of the Bahamas Operation Raleigh organisation flew in with his wife on the now familiar small floatplane to see the nearly completed track-making project. His committee wanted to name a lookout after me on the highest point on the island, as an acknowledgement for my efforts. I did not feel comfortable with this. If they were determined to do that, I suggested they use the fictional pirate's name of Long John - Long John's Lookout - as it fitted in with the pirate history of neighbouring Warderick Wells Cay. It had also been my nickname as a schoolboy.

I was now to fly out on their floatplane, back to Nassau to complete paperwork at the Operation Raleigh Headquarters, then four days later fly on to Freeport to finally join the *Lord Nelson*, the real reason I was out here in the Bahamas in the first place.

So my island track-making mission was finished. The *Lord Nelson* venturers on the island would have a few more days by themselves to make finishing touches on their tracks and pack up before rejoining the *Sea Hawler* for the return voyage to Freeport. There we would all join the barque *Lord Nelson* for its homecoming voyage to England. It had spent the northern winter in the Caribbean Sea on sailing adventures, to earn funds for its owner, the Jubilee Sailing Trust. Our task was to sail the vessel back, in late winter, to its home port of Southampton. Our track-making days were over, our sailing days only just beginning.



'Salty tales' - the guest After Dinner Speaker with Nelson.

# Things to do - more boat-building

**David Stamp** shows that many hands don't necessarily spoil the boat.

Community boat-building is all the go. For me it started with a visit ten years ago to Ullapool, in Scotland, where we came across 6.7 m long St Ayles coastal rowing skiffs built and rowed by groups from Scottish coastal towns and villages. My next encounter was helping members of the Welsh Church in Melbourne, guided by their minister Jim Barr, build a St Ayles skiff in their upstairs hall – and yes, before building began we made sure we could get the boat out of the building and down the outside stairway. We got the boat out with help from a crew working on the building site next door. The current venture is building a 5 m long rowing and sailing skiff with a small group under the auspices of the Box Hill Baptist Church, again with Jim as initiator and leader.

The first things to do were to assess our capabilities, the time available, and what kind of boat to build. The design was selected by democratic discussion among about five people, following a few criteria – good appearance, suited to a variety of sea conditions, able to carry three adults, straightforward to build, easy to maintain, not too heavy, intended use of the finished boat, and (very importantly) able to fit into the double garage of Jim's manse with a bit of space to work around the boat. We discussed the options of *Build It and They Will Come* and *Get Them to Come and then Build It*. We have an amalgam of the two, with some people coming to see what we are building, then joining in.

We ended up choosing the Linnet design, created by Richard Woods of the UK. The boat is 4.86 m long, 1.3 m beam (width), and should (we hope) weigh about 50 kg empty. Getting the plans was simple – it required going to a web-site, transferring a smallish sum of money to the designer, then downloading and printing sixteen A4-sized pages of plans and instructions. All measurements were provided in tables, ready for transferring measurement points to sheets of marine plywood. After joining the dots, pieces were cut out by jigsaw, joined together, and after a few passes of the magic wand, we

had the shape of a boat, held in position in a rigid temporary building frame, and kept in shape by copious use of copper wire, fibreglass tape and epoxy resin. We are now at the stage of fitting out the inside of the hull, and beginning to talk about possible paint colours and a completion date. We are opting for the sailing variant, which will involve the fitting of a dagger-board and its case, making a rudder, and rigging with spars and sail from another boat long vanished into the mists of time, and possibly the murky waters of Western Port.

When we gather on Mondays we make sure there is a supply of tea and coffee and something to eat, and we talk about many things, some of which are to do with boat-building, but then, that is part of the whole idea of such a program. We each have a nickname derived from ranks used in the eighteenth century British Navy, and a few weeks ago we struggled to understand each other on Talk Like a Pirate Day. For some, working on boats with curves all over the place is quite different from usual straight-line woodwork around the house, and to keep the boat construction looking right one has to frequently stop work and step back to view the work from many angles to be sure that all the curves look fair – and even then some unwanted bumps can slip by unnoticed.

If anyone would like to call by between 10 am and about 2 pm on most Mondays to view our work and help drink a cup of T or C, please let me know.



# Settling in to Cornwall

Former AusTAR **Paul Rodwell** updates us on his new life in Cornwall.

Hello AUSTARS,

It was good to get an email from Jan but it was a surprise when I realised it is about a year since I last wrote anything to *Furthest South*.

I am well into my second year here in Cornwall and I am noticing the continually changing seasons so different from those on the Atherton Tableland. In my report to *Signals* on the Blackdown Hills walk I commented on the beauty of English spring that I hadn't experienced right through for more than thirty years. It starts with fresh bright green growth and then there are a succession of flowers of all colours: yellow, pink, blue and white. Now in November we are going through autumn; again there are changing colours, this time the leaves turning from green to all shades of yellow, orange, red and brown.

No doubt being TARS I should write to you about TARY things. You will probably read the bits in *Signals* and think I am busily involved but in reality being in Cornwall is to England what Cape Yorke Peninsula is to Australia -- just on a smaller scale. In fact, many Cornish people consider the River Tamar marks the boundary between the Kingdom of England and the Duchy of Cornwall!

Having said that, in reality, one of the good things about moving to England is that it is much easier to get to events both with TARS and other groups. However, it takes four hours to get out of Cornwall by public transport so unless I set out at the crack of dawn it is still difficult to make morning meetings. I've solved that by going to visit my daughter in Exeter before the events so I have a four hour start on the next part of the journey. I am also grateful to others who travel by car who are so generous giving lifts.

I have managed to get to the two expeditions with SW TARS (as *Signals* readers will have read), the walk in the Blackdown Hills around Hemyock and the bus /steamer/train ride from Paignton, Totnes, Dartmouth and back to Paignton.

In August I went to the IAGM in Suffolk at the Royal Hospital School. The school is an amazing place, built around 1930 for sons of naval officers with no expense spared! In the distant past I had seen it while sailing on the River Stour but then I never dreamed of staying there! Apart from meeting people I had only heard of (and seeing on Zoom others from *Furthest South!*), the highlights for me were the trip in a sailing barge to Secret Water and the walk along the Arthur Ransome Walking Trail. When I was a child we would visit a beach not far from Secret Water and I remem-



North Cornwall Coast: Trevoze Head from Park Head



Mawgan Porth beach

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ber most times seeing Thames sailing barges with their big red sails sailing to and from the Rivers Stour and Orwell. Now I have actually been on one!

The Arthur Ransome Walking Trail is a section of the coastal footpath from Pin Mill to Shotley associated with AR and signed to explain that this stretch of the River Orwell is described in *We Didn't Mean To Go To Sea*. Long ago I had sailed this stretch of the estuaries on past visits to England.

So what about other areas of life?

Last time I wrote I was selling my river boat, *Blue Dolphin*. She was on the wrong side of the country and there are no canals of any size away from the Midlands. I wanted to establish roots in St Columb Major and couldn't do that boating two hundred miles away! (There is a St. Columb Minor right next to Newquay but the big one is usually just called 'Columb'.)

There is plenty to do or be involved with in Columb. A number of organisations have groups called things like 'Well-being Cafe', 'Just Be', 'Chill and Chat' and 'Laughter Crafters' which are places one can 'drop in' and meet others and drink coffee and eat cakes! Most have evolved to cater for one group of society such as mothers with toddlers or ladies knitting, crocheting and other crafts. I have joined the Wednesday Well-being Cafe where around twenty of us 'do art' and I am learning water-colours! A number of these groups are part of a local charity called Oasis and I am one of their volunteers, looking after the office one morning a week. I also am involved with St Columb Parish Church and realised the other day that my attempts to be part of Columb must be working when one lady said something to the effect that 'You seem to have always been here'!

A different sort of group is the Old Cornwall Society which keeps many of the old rural customs alive and also is involved with history and archaeology. From time to time they arrange outings. One recent one was a boat trip up the Fowey River to Lostwithiel where we had a guided historical tour.

There is lots to do here before one goes walking on the many footpaths, visits the coast with its high cliffs and surfing beaches or explores the patches of moorland and woodland.

I have attached three photos of the coast. Mawgan Porth is my nearest beach. In amongst the black dots in the sea on Christmas morning are my son and grandson!

By the time this gets to you it will probably be time to wish you all a Happy Christmas!

S A A F E !

Paul.



Christmas morning

## VicTARS' Christmas party

**A participant** spills the beans on the festivities.

Suddenly, it was Christmas party time again, and nineteen VicTARS girded their loins and headed for East Ivanhoe, laden with contributions to the feast.

The VicTARS once-a-year a capella choir was in particularly fine voice this year. The concert included some traditional carols and a Wheeler and James favourite. We all joined in to an AR-themed version of 'The twelve days of Christmas' and an Australian version of 'Jingle bells.' The session was much enjoyed by participants, audience and, as we subsequently found out, the neighbours.

Then it was lunch time. The weather bureau had organised a perfect day for us, so we were able to distribute ourselves to the garden as well as indoors. As we pulled our crackers Jan surprised us all with an award for each person. Some of them, which marked achievements during the year, elicited applause, while others, noting memorable mishaps, were met with laughter.

Jan had previously asked us all to be prepared with a party piece. Most of us were suddenly taken shy, but Jan, and the duo of Elizabeth and David S, had prepared enjoyable readings. Hedley refreshed our knowledge of Henry Lawson, and gave a stirring recital of Lawson's

poem 'Flag of the southern cross', followed by an even more dramatic (and hilarious) recital of the Wayne and Schuster sketch from the 1950s, 'Rinse the blood off my toga'. This made some of the older ones among us quite nostalgic as well.

Our entremets was, as usual, the piñata. This year's was a Christmas pudding studded with glittery golden fruit, covered with 'cream' and decorated with (real) holly. A serious design fault sent it crashing to the ground (luckily unbroken) but a crew of our resident engineers quickly put it right.

After dessert (a positive orgy of cream and sugar) Kris Kringle distributed the presents. Each year we hold an auction of second-hand books and other items to raise money for a nominated charity. This year we raised \$130 for the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Program, which provides lodging, food and other assistance, with no government support at all.

Finally and reluctantly, replete with good food and friendship, we dispersed to our homes.

Any TARS who happen to be in Melbourne next year will be very welcome to join us.



The choir in action (L to R Barb, Jan, Hedley, Elizabeth, Jessica, Bradley, Alison, Nancy)

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The engineers repair the piñata



Barb gives it a whack



VicTARS doing what VicTARS do best ...



Very best wishes to all our readers for  
Christmas, Hanukkah and the New Year

Our thanks to all those who support *Furthest South*  
by sending us articles and items of news

Our stalwart regular contributors have done us proud, as usual. But if you haven't written for us, your fellow TARS would love to hear from you—short or long, factual or imaginative, text, drawings or photographs.

Send your articles to  
Gill Metz <gm\_squared@hotmail.com> by 28 February, please.

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